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HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE ON THE REVIEW
OF TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES
Ninth session
New York, 30 May-2 June 1995
Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF THE BUREAU OF THE HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE AND THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

SUMMARY

The present document is submitted in compliance with paragraphs 2 to 7 of decision 8/1 and paragraphs 1 to 5 of section II of decision 8/2 of the High-level Committee regarding:

(a) The timing of the future meetings of the High-level Committee (decision 8.1, paras. 2 and 5) (sect. I);

(b) The implementation of the guidelines for the review of policies and procedures by the United Nations development system concerning technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC) (decision 8/1, paras. 4-7) (sect. II);

(c) Organizational and supportive arrangements for TCDC, such as administrative, legal, information and financial arrangements (decision 8/2, sect. II, paras. 1-5) (sect. III).

* TCDC/9/L.1.

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I. TIMING OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE

1. The High-level Committee on the Review of Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries meets every two years prior to the meeting of the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The ninth meeting, in 1995, is expected to report on activities of the calendar years 1993 and 1994. At its eighth session, in paragraph 2 of its decision 8/1, the Committee requested the Bureau of the High-level Committee to adjust, on the advice of the Administrator of UNDP, the dates of submission of accurate and timely information by Governments, organizations of the United Nations system and intergovernmental organizations for the preparation of the reports on the progress made in implementing the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries.

2. Most of the organizations operate on a calendar-year basis and reports for the year are collated only in about March of the following year. The Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries in UNDP, however, must compile all the information by December/January to be able to report to the High-level Committee in May/June. The report therefore fails to capture comprehensively all the activities of the previous calendar year.

3. The UNDP Executive Board now meets four times a year and important issues are discussed at all sessions. Still, the annual session in May/June is expected to have better representation for two reasons; many important issues will continue to be brought up at that session and it is also open to all members. It would seem desirable, therefore, to schedule the meeting of the High-level Committee to precede that session.

4. The Bureau considered the issue and the options available to see what changes or adjustments could be made. The deadline for receipt of information cannot be changed by the Special Unit for TCDC as long as the meeting is held in May/June. One way, therefore, to provide full coverage of the two-year period of activities is to prepare the progress report later in the year. Thus, if one High-level Committee meeting is deferred by a year it will be possible to report on two full years of activities. The meeting scheduled to be held in 1997, if it was held in 1998, would have complete reports for 1995 and 1996. Each biennial meeting would be held regularly thereafter. The preparation by the Special Unit for TCDC for the 1998 meeting would begin in August 1997 instead of December 1996. The meeting in 2000 would cover 1997 and 1998, and information for those years would be requested for submission by August 1999. The Bureau decided to recommend to the High-level Committee at its ninth session to consider holding the tenth session in 1998 instead of 1997. It should also be noted that the 1998 meeting could celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, which was held in Buenos Aires in 1978, and it will also be the tenth meeting of the High-level Committee. The problem of current information would not be resolved by pursuing this option.

5. The problem with this proposal is that the progress report for consideration would be outdated by the time it comes before the Committee; in 1998 the Committee will be considering the report on activities of 1995 and

1996. This delayed consideration of the progress report will not change even if the schedule of meetings is undisturbed and if for the 1997 meeting the coverage is restricted to one year only, i.e., 1995.

6. There is an alternative view that the High-level Committee meeting should be scheduled for September when the Executive Board has its autumn meeting. But it will have to be scheduled prior to the session of the General Assembly when it would be difficult to hold a five-day meeting of the Committee.

7. The advantage of this alternative is that the review of the previous two years performance would not be significantly delayed. Preparations for the meeting of 1997 would begin in April 1997 and documentation completed by July, with the actual meeting held in September. One meeting, that of 1997, would be delayed by three months and the subsequent meetings would be held at intervals of two years thereafter. The limitation of this option is that it would not be possible to report the results of the High-level Committee through the Economic and Social Council during the Council's annual session.

8. The Bureau has decided to present these options to the ninth meeting of the High-level Committee for its decision with the recommendation that the present arrangements and timing be maintained, providing to United Nations organizations and Governments the possibility of providing verbal updated reports to the Committee.

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GUIDELINES FOR THE REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES BY THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM CONCERNING TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

9. In its decision 8/1, the High-level Committee took note of the guidelines and recommendations approved by the Administrative Committee on Coordination and requested the organizations of the United Nations system to apply them on an experimental basis. It also called upon the Administrative Committee to monitor closely their implementation. In addition, it requested the Administrator of UNDP to report on the implementation of the decision. The present report is submitted accordingly.

10. A meeting of the United Nations agency focal points was held in July 1993 shortly after the eighth session of the High-level Committee. The next meeting is scheduled to take place at the time of the ninth session of the Committee. These meetings provide for a review of the guidelines and ideas on their application. The meeting in 1993 decided that UNDP should issue a comprehensive document on High-level Committee decision 8/1, highlighting the significance of the call by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1992/41 for first consideration to be given to the TCDC modality and explaining the TCDC strategy for the 1990s. It also decided that agencies should take action to review and revise, if necessary, policies and instructions in the light of the guidelines. Furthermore, it was decided that the next report to the Administrative Committee on Coordination on application of the guidelines would be considered at the next meeting of the agency focal points.

11. Based on the views expressed in the meeting of the agency focal points, the Special Unit for TCDC prepared a document entitled "Major decisions on TCDC", which was widely circulated to all Member States and the organizations of the United Nations development system. The guidelines approved in 1993 requested all organizations to emphasize four basic issues: a common system-wide definition of TCDC; a check-list of core policy elements (e.g., training, financing, focal points, data/information and networking); self-contained instructions on TCDC for staff use; and strengthening of internal systems for monitoring and review of TCDC. Most of the organizations concerned have reported on their application of these guidelines.

12. The various actions taken by the organizations that have reported so far are summarized below.

13. The TCDC policies and priorities of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) are in accord with the guidelines and hence it was not necessary to take special action. FAO has, however, initiated further action for promoting TCDC. Sensitization of FAO staff and project personnel on TCDC has been pursued and internal procedures for strengthening networking and twinning arrangements have been refined. A new system of using experts in the TCDC modality has been instituted and a framework agreement for the purpose has been put into operation. Emphasis is also being placed on following up promotional efforts, such as capacities and needs matching exercises. The information system and database that can enhance TCDC is being enriched, refined and made widely available. The medium-term plan for 1994-1999 approved by the FAO Conference in 1993 has provided a general framework for support to TCDC/economic cooperation among developing countries (ECDC) as cross-sectoral thematic priorities.

14. The World Health Organization (WHO) explained its TCDC policies and procedures in an interregional consultation on TCDC programming in health, held in Jakarta in February 1993. The seventeenth and eighteenth meetings of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and other developing country ministers of health, held in Jakarta in 1993 and in Geneva in 1994, considered the policies and guidelines and gave an impetus to the expansion of TCDC. WHO has reported difficulties owing to insufficient knowledge in the application of TCDC and an inadequate flow of information about it between countries. In its programme of work, WHO is giving added emphasis to strengthening TCDC focal points and the development of information systems.

15. A resolution adopted by the Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1993 made a specific commitment to TCDC and pledged to apply that modality, particularly in the countries in transition. TCDC is emphasized by ILO in its staff training programmes.

16. The new initiative in the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is the integration of ECDC/TCDC into the Investment and Technology Promotion Division and its linkage with the International Cooperation and Consultations Service. There is also greater integration of the Industrial and Technological Information Bank (INTIB) with the TCDC Information Referral System (INRES).

17. The Congress of the Universal Postal Union adopted in 1994 a specific resolution (No. 031) for applying TCDC in its operations and to undertake periodic evaluation of the impact of TCDC.

18. The International Telecommunication Union is emphasizing sensitization on TCDC and in two particular programmes of its Action Plan, adopted in 1994, has given special prominence to the TCDC modality.

19. The United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) issued extensive guidelines on TCDC in October 1993, clearly giving priority to TCDC in programming UNFPA support and delineating the modalities to be followed at the country level. It also strengthened and clarified the role of the focal point located at its headquarters.

20. In May 1994, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific issued new instructions on the application of the TCDC modality, and the restructuring of the Commission has made the promotion and application of TCDC the responsibility of all divisions, with the Programme Management Division acting as a focal point and as a liaison office.

21. On the basis of the decisions of the High-level Committee on the guidelines and the strategy, the Special Unit for TCDC has prepared a TCDC manual. In addition to providing guidance on various promotional and operational TCDC activities, the manual deals with the four basic issues emphasized in the guidelines.

22. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has raised a question about the criteria for determining a TCDC activity and considers that it is too restrictive. The point that UNCTAD makes is that many activities not really managed and implemented by the participating countries or their institutions but executed by an agency or the UNDP Office for Project Services are directed towards supporting cooperation among developing countries, including sharing of developing countries' own expertise, facilities and other capacities with one another. Exclusion of such activities merely because of the strict application of the criteria, in the view of UNCTAD, needs reconsideration.

23. The entire subject will be reviewed in the forthcoming meeting of the agency focal points and the issue of criteria for determining a TCDC activity, as raised by UNCTAD, will also be considered. The deliberations in the High-level Committee meeting will also influence the review of the guidelines on policies and procedures for TCDC in the United Nations development system before a report is prepared for consideration by the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL AND SUPPORTIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, SUCH AS ADMINISTRATIVE, LEGAL, INFORMATION AND FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

24. In paragraphs 3 and 4 of section II of its decision 8/2, the High-level Committee invited the Executive Board of UNDP to consider (a) maintaining the staffing level that existed at that time; and (b) maintaining the approved Special Programme Resources allocation for TCDC for the fifth cycle (1992-1996).

25. During the biennium 1994-1995, the Special Unit for TCDC was required to reduce its staffing by one Professional post (from eight to seven) in line with the reductions made in other headquarters bureaux and units, but it maintained its nine General Service posts.

26. During 1994, there was a turnover of six staff members, including the Director and Deputy Director. Several positions remained vacant for some time and only towards the end of the year were all seven Professional staff positions filled. Since mid-1994, one staff member has been assisting the Group of 77 secretariat on a full-time basis in the management of the Perez Guerrero Trust Fund. In the light of budgetary constraints, this position is being funded as a supernumerary post.

27. Because of overall resource constraints, the Special Programme Resources allocation for TCDC was reduced by 30 per cent from the originally approved level of $15 million. For the period 1992-1996, the total resources available for the TCDC programme was $13.25 million, including $2.75 million carried over from the fourth cycle.

28. Prior to the approval in 1993 of the four subprogrammes under the fifth cycle, expenditures on activities were met from the carried-over resources and some advance commitments were made for new activities. Under the four subprogrammes of the fifth cycle, including commitments made prior to formal approval of the subprogrammes, funds spent or committed for ongoing activities up to the end of 1994 amount to a little less than $9 million. This leaves an unspent balance of about $3.3 million for the remaining two years of the fifth cycle. Meanwhile, under the direction of the Office of Evaluation and Strategic Planning and the Special Unit for TCDC, an evaluation of the fifth cycle Special Programme Resources TCDC programme has just been completed.

29. These issues are brought to the notice of the High-level Committee in keeping with paragraphs 3 and 4 of section II of decision 8/2.